

TO: CO-CHAIR JOSEPH P. GRESKO, CO-CHAIR CHRISTINE COHEN, VICE CHAIR CHRISTINE PALM, VICE CHAIR DEREK SLAP AND MEMBERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: DR. NAN ZYLA-WISENSALE

RE: SUPPORT FOR RAISED H.B. NO. 5140

DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2022

I am submitting testimony in SUPPORT of RAISED H.B. NO. 5140, AN ACT CONCERNING THE HAND-HARVESTING OF HORSESHOE CRABS IN THE STATE

Horseshoe crabs, known as “living fossils,” have lived, unchanged, for hundreds of millions of years. This bill addresses their calamitous decline in population resulting from years of being “harvested” for the purpose of serving as fishing bait in commercial eel and whelk fisheries. In addition, the use of their blue blood (due to its unique, bacteria-detecting ability) in testing the safety of pharmaceuticals (including the COVID-19 vaccines) and medical devices (although an artificial substitute developed by Eli Lilly is available for use and is utilized by countries in the European Union) has also increased their decline in numbers, as has their habitat loss caused by the effects pollution, climate change, and shoreline development.

The value of horseshoe crabs as a keystone species has been clearly recognized, and as such they are crucial in maintaining biodiversity for the health of the environment and of other species. Horseshoe crabs’ eggs serve as a critical food source for several species of birds, such as red knots, on their yearly, long-haul migrations between their Arctic breeding grounds and Tierra del Fuego. Their eggs also serve as food for several fish species.

The necessity of protecting this prehistoric species is readily apparent. Public Act No. 18-112 was passed by the Connecticut State Legislature in 2018 “for the purpose of preserving the horseshoe crab population in the state.” Further, the purpose of amended section 26-159a-17 (RCSA) is to “address the depleted state of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound.” The 2019 Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) horseshoe crab stock assessment concluded that the Long Island Sound horseshoe crab stock is in “poor condition.”

Also, “In response to the stock assessment, the ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Management Board requested that Connecticut and New York take regulatory action to reduce the commercial harvest of horseshoe crabs.”

In conclusion, I strongly urge members of the Environment Committee to pass Raised H.B. No. 5140.